

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Symphonie Fantastique
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 17 January, 2024
7:30pm

CBSO.CO.UK



KAZUKI GONDO
CONDUCTS
SYMPHONIE
FANTASTIQUE

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Concert programme £4



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INTRODUCTION

This programme contains three very special pieces, and I can't wait for us to share them with you, and our patron His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh KG GCVO, who joins us at this evening's concert.

We open with a piece by Dai Fujikura, who is a very close friend of mine - I met him when I was 30, and although he is a little older than me, we have a brotherly bond. He is also now one of the most famous Japanese composers in the world.

This piece (a CBSO Commission) is fantastic, and Dai has his own unique approach to composing. Sometimes, I feel like there's no gravity in his music. It's very interesting; and although people can imagine the drama from the music, in this piece, they can primarily enjoy the sounds. It's quite a difficult piece for the orchestra, but everyone is happy after the performance. It's very special.

I'm really looking forward to Eugene, our super concertmaster, playing the Walton. We've only done one concerto together in the past, which was Mozart's Fifth. But he plays so incredibly that I really want to see him as a soloist with the orchestra more regularly. And not just for me, but for the CBSO and for our audience, having Eugene as a soloist is special - he is a wonderful soloist who can also be a concertmaster, and we are very happy to have him.

We finish the concert with *Symphonie Fantastique*, another very special piece for me. I'm a French music conductor; I won the Besançon International Conducting Competition, the French conducting competition, and started my career in France. I have conducted this piece many times - it was one of my first professional orchestral performances. It is a part of my body; it's very strong, and it requires some madness and crazy feelings, which are sometimes totally without elegance.

For me, I think *Symphonie Fantastique* is describing somehow an increased imagination through using opium. And the main theme is Berlioz' love for the Irish actress Harriet Smithson. This symphony is a big love letter to her.



Fujikura, Wavering World
(CBSO Commission: UK Premiere), 15mins

Walton, Violin Concerto, 28mins

Interval

Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique, 55mins

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor
Rita Castro Blanco, Assistant Conductor
Eugene Tzkindelean, Violin

MEMBERS' RECEPTION

From 6.45pm pre-concert and during the interval.

FREE PRE-CONCERT CONVERSATION

Join Eugene Tzkindelean and Catherine Arlidge for an informal pre-concert conversation at 6.30pm in the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space.

We are very happy for you to take photographs and short video clips at our concerts, but please refrain from recording the whole performance. We'd love you to share them with us @TheCBSO.

We do ask that you are mindful of disturbing other audience members and therefore ask that you dim the brightness on your phone, take pictures during applause breaks and do not use your flash.

We also regularly take photographs for promotional use, so you may see a professional photographer at our concerts. Please ask a member of the front of house team if you have any questions about this.

To ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the performance, please make sure your mobile phone is set to silent.

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KAZUKI CONDUCTS SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE

"Hopelessly in love, a young artist falls into a delirium, and sees the strangest of visions..." The result: Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, an outrageous, no-holds-barred adventure for a giant orchestra – just the sort of music that Kazuki Yamada and the CBSO love to share! First, though, Dai Fujikura's ravishing vision of a newly-made world, and sheer dazzlement from our leader Eugene Tzikin-delean in Walton's gleaming Violin Concerto.

Dai Fujikura (b.1977)

WAVERING WORLD

One way or another, all music tells a story. For the Japanese-born composer Dai Fujikura a commission from the Seattle Symphony launched an imaginative journey that began with the music of Sibelius and led him through Finnish and then Japanese myth to the vivid, ravishing sounds of *Wavering World* – premiered in February 2022.

It really was a journey, too. "I realised I didn't know anything about Japanese mythology" he says. "When I grew up in Japan, I learned nothing about traditional culture. I didn't even hear Japanese instruments until I heard them in Germany":

"I learned that three Gods appeared when heaven and earth split for the first time – a great sonic image. I did not imagine bombastic, loud music from this image,

but something gentler, that focussed on the discovery of the new liminal world which would appear. This is how the work begins."

"The basic structure of the universe after the split is three vertical worlds. Apparently, the world where all the Gods live is the upper world, the world where the humans live is the middle ground – where lots of reeds grow – and then finally, the dead live in the underworld. I wasn't interested in creating programmatic music. What inspired me the most was the middle world, the Earth, where the humans live."

"I imagine this human world to be full of reeds swaying in the breeze. According to anthropologists, swaying reeds are a typical image in East Asian myths, likely due to the highly humid climate that makes water rushes and reeds quite common plants. For me, the last third of *Wavering World* is the movement of these reeds, swaying, weaving, growing upwards, while the shape

of humans, maybe even the shape of islands and the world are created. Lots of melodies surround the swaying woodwinds."

"According to my reading, as most of the Gods "appeared" from nowhere so have these reeds just started growing. Nobody specific created anything; it was there before, the lives and the world formed from nowhere and then their interaction became possible. This idea struck me as particularly interesting."

"The world which existed before the Gods was like oil in water, moving like jellyfish (!). I liked this image of uncertainty. Maybe this is the middle part of Wavering World - a wandering timpani solo surrounded by the world that floats around it. An uncertain world is floating without knowing what kind of world it will be."

William Walton (1902-1983)

VIOLIN CONCERTO

- I Andante tranquillo
- II Presto capriccioso alla napolitana
- III Vivace

Right from the very start of Walton's Violin Concerto, the violin sings – or rather, it dreams. "Sognando" writes Walton over the first, rapturous melody: "Dreaming". It wasn't what anyone expected from the daring young composer who had scandalised fashionable society in the 1920s. Walton's reputation was sky-high: three weeks after the premiere of his First Symphony in 1935, the famous Russian-American violinist Jascha Heifetz took him to lunch at the Berkeley Hotel and commissioned a violin concerto before even calling for the bill.

By the time Heifetz finally got to premiere "his" concerto – in Cleveland, Ohio, in December 1939 – Europe was at war. But Walton had other concerns. Newly in love with the aristocratic Alice Wimborne, he'd just discovered the warmth and beauty of the Bay of Naples, where they spent blissful

weeks in early 1938. As the skies over Europe darkened, Walton worked on his concerto amid paradise gardens. "It seems to be developing in an extremely intimate way" he confessed to a musical friend.

He needn't have worried. Even if the Concerto is the work of a newly tender and relaxed Walton, his old fire was never far from the surface (Naples, after all, lies at the foot of an active volcano). The rapturous first movement sparkles, sings and dreams. And the flamboyant second movement ("Very fast and capricious, in the Neapolitan style") positive flashes: a whirling dance (Walton joked that he'd been bitten by a tarantula and had gone "quite gaga") interrupted by a bittersweet *canzonetta* ("little song"). The finale pulls everything together – soaring, dancing and dazzling - before summoning all its strength to stride confidently, defiantly out to face the world.

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE, OP.14A

- I Rêveries – Passions
(Dreams and passions)
- II Un bal (A ball)
- III Scène aux champs
(Scene in the country)
- IV Marche au supplice
(March to the scaffold)
- V Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat
(Dream of a witches' Sabbath)

"Fantastic Symphony: Episode in the life of an Artist."

"A young artist of an unusually sensitive nature and a vivid imagination has taken opium in the depths of lovesick despair. The drug has thrown him into a deep sleep, accompanied by the most extraordinary visions. In this state, his feelings and his memories take on the form of musical ideas. Even his Beloved One takes the form of a melody in his mind – an *idée fixe*

[an obsessive idea], which returns constantly, and which he sees everywhere."

That's the story that Hector Berlioz claimed to tell in his *Symphonie Fantastique* – and at least one part of it was entirely true. He really was "a young artist of an unusually sensitive nature and a vivid imagination", and in the spring of 1830, he was studying in Paris in the grip of not one, but three overpowering passions.

The first was Shakespeare. In September 1827, an English theatre company had performed *Hamlet* in Paris: it "struck me like a thunderbolt", he recalled. The second was Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony: "Beethoven opened before me a new world of music". And the third was love: crazy, unrequited love. Harriet Smithson was an Irish actress in the Shakespeare company; Berlioz had never even spoken to her, but he was smitten all the same. Meanwhile Camille Moke, a 21-year old pianist, took that as a challenge: "She set my senses on fire till all the devils of hell danced in my veins".

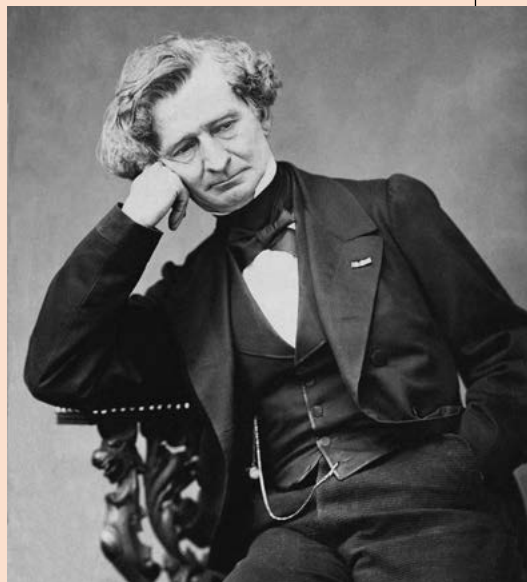
So those were the ingredients. Mixed together in the mind of a young composer in love with the gothic and the Romantic, the result was the *Symphonie Fantastique*, written early in 1830 and first performed on 9th December 1832. Harriet was in the audience. Amazed by its programme, she made enquiries about the composer – "That poor young man...I hope he's forgotten me". Instead she learned, to her astonishment, that the piece was actually inspired by her. They were married within the year.

Berlioz insisted that his music should speak without words and the *Symphonie Fantastique* is definitely graphic enough to speak for itself! The one idea to bear in mind is the *idée fixe* – the tune representing the Beloved, which recurs throughout the Symphony. It's the long, lilting melody played by the violins immediately after the start of the fast *Passions* section of the first movement – coming after the long, wandering *Rêveries*.

Un bal is just that – an elegant Parisian valse, with harps glittering like diamonds. The Beloved appears, on oboe, in the centre of the movement – and our hero's heart is still skipping beats. In the peaceful *Scène aux champs* a lonely shepherd (cor anglais) pipes to his offstage sweetheart (oboe). By the end of the movement, his only reply is a distant rumble of thunder.

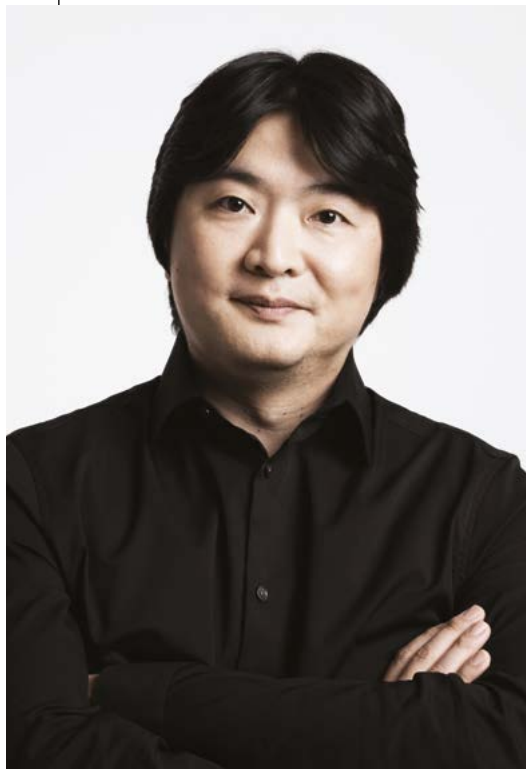
In the *Marche au supplice* the drugs have kicked in: our artist hallucinates that he's being executed, and the *idée fixe* makes a final appearance on clarinet before the guillotine blade falls and the head bounces into the basket. But it's not over: the scene darkens for a hellish supernatural fantasy of witches rejoicing in his doom. There are orchestral bells as midnight strikes, and the tuba belts out the *Dies Irae* funeral plainchant. As the dance spirals into madness, Berlioz unleashes everything he has left in a riotous orgy of sound.

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PORTRAIT OF HECTOR BERLIOZ BY PIERRE PETIT, 1863.
PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

KAZUKI YAMADA



© BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Kazuki Yamada is Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), a role he commenced in Spring 2023. Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo (OPMC). Yamada has forged a link between Monaco and Birmingham having conducted collaborative performances with CBSO Chorus of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in both cities in 2019 and Orff's *Carmina Burana* in 2023. Time spent under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Kazuki Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan every season with NHK Symphony Orchestra and in his position as Principal Guest Conductor with Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. Shortly after assuming his position in Birmingham, Yamada gave a series of concerts on tour around Japan with the CBSO in summer 2023 and will take OPMC on tour to Japan in 2024.

EUGENE TZIKINDELEAN

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Born into a musical family in Romania and educated in Bucharest and Paris, Tzikindelean won top prizes in international competitions including the Enescu Competition in Romania, the Carl Nielsen International Competition in Denmark and France's Long-Thibaud-Crespin Competition. Leader of the CBSO since 2020, Eugene has previously held a position with the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, and has been Leader of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark. He also keeps a busy schedule as a soloist, chamber musician and has been invited to guest lead ensembles such as London Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, Wiener Symphoniker, Göteborg Symphoniker, Stavanger, Trondheim and Singapore Symphony Orchestras.



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Jane Wright*
Robert Bilson
Nathan Bomans*
Angus Bain
Mark Robinson*
Bethan Allmand*
Wendy Quirk
Katharine Gittings
Victoria Gill
Jessica Coleman
James Pattinson
Adam Hill

VIOLIN II

Lowri Porter
Ruth Heney
Moritz Pfister*
Catherine Arlidge*
Amy Jones*
Georgia Hannant*
Richard Thomas
Bryony Morrison*
Yuriko Matsuda
Tam Mott
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*

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*

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